



**Idaho State Senate**  
**Idaho House of Representatives**  
Democratic Leadership

State Capitol  
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## **Press Release**

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For immediate release - Tuesday, January 08, 2013

### **BOISE - Joint Minority Address to the State**

We're excited about the prospect of this new Legislative session and the opportunity to work with the governor and our Republican colleagues.

As Idaho Democrats, we believe that elected officials are servants of the public. The first, most important task of such service is to listen to the public. Last year, we knocked on thousands of doors across the state. We met with businesses, local governments and citizen groups in large and small communities. We heard that our first priority as we approach any decision is to weigh how these decisions will lead to stronger communities, prosperous businesses, and bright futures for our children so they have the opportunity to raise families in Idaho.

All of our decisions are guided by this basic value: strong communities are places where families and businesses prosper together.

Many indicators suggest that policymakers over the past two decades have drifted off course. Our personal income and wages are among the lowest in the nation. Having lost more than 60,000 jobs between 2007 and 2009, Idaho has created only 21,000 jobs since 2009. Our investment in education ranks second-to-last in the nation. Our investment in public infrastructure has flat-lined. Many families are torn apart as parents work multiple jobs or leave the state for better employment opportunities. And, systematic neglect of our mental health care system contributes to higher prison populations and a tragically high suicide rate.

It is in this difficult environment that we meet to serve Idaho.

We know that the people of Idaho want leaders who solve problems, not create them. They want open, accountable and responsive government. We applaud the steps taken by the Pro Tem and Speaker to improve the ethics culture and will continue to work with them in this endeavor. We remain committed to restoring the public's trust with the creation of an independent ethics commission. Further, we believe that we honor the vision of our Founding Fathers by improving our democratic election process and we will soon propose bills to achieve this goal.

We have listened to Governor Otter's State of the State address and found much to like in his comments. We want to thank the governor for his work. But we find some aspects of his proposed budget troubling.

We appreciate that his approach to the personal property tax issue includes consideration of creating new, local revenue opportunities. However, while we seek policy to help our major employers thrive, we must be sure that our communities are not impoverished. The legislature must not force communities to cut critical services like ambulances, firefighting, and police. The legislature must ensure that school districts aren't forced to slash budgets and degrade educational opportunities further. We must equip communities to meet the demands of local businesses—sound roads and bridges, broadband internet access and a qualified workforce. And we must not raise taxes on homeowners as we have with similar efforts in the recent past.

We recognize the governor's desire to eliminate the business personal property tax, but we are troubled by some of the priorities his budget reveals. Community mental health is sorely needed but he proposes a mental health prison. Businesses require trained and capable workers, but there is no additional support for higher education, and the meager 2% bump in K-12 funding still leaves us at the bottom. And without adequate maintenance money for State facilities and fair wages for workers, will we be able to serve our communities and our businesses in a way that promotes success?

We believe that any approach to the personal property tax issue should be as careful and inclusive of local input as the Governor has advocated regarding Medicaid expansion and educational improvement. Along those lines, we will carefully consider the governor's proposal to create an Idaho Health Insurance Exchange.

The people of Idaho are struggling to keep their families whole and have asked us to help create jobs. We support the governor's use of tax incentives to encourage businesses to hire veterans and will have complimentary veterans' jobs bills this year. We also look forward to reintroducing some of our previous proposals, like Senator Lacey's and Representative Pence's "value-added" agricultural bill, to help create well-paying jobs here in Idaho. We're also working on "Buy Idaho" legislation that will give Idaho companies and Idaho workers preference when it comes to completing Idaho public works projects. This dovetails nicely with the governor's support for Buy Idaho initiatives within the private sector.

Efforts such as these give our children the opportunity to raise their families in Idaho. We will do all we can as well to help our small businesses, which are the backbone of our small communities, to thrive and to employ their neighbors.

We've heard our neighbors all across the state say that they want their children to have world-class educational opportunities. We will work hard to make sure that educational improvement is based on meaningful participation from parents and teachers, school boards and administrators, as well as the business community that relies on an educated workforce. We will support innovations that are proven to create educational success and future opportunities for our kids. We cannot overstate our commitment to a dedicated and careful investment in education—both K-12 and higher education.

We are indeed fortunate to live in Idaho. Despite the difficult times, we are people who work hard. We are people who value our communities. Idaho leads the nation in volunteerism. Our beautiful communities are time and again listed in national publications as great places for raising families, recreating or starting businesses. We have the talent and the work ethic we need to meet any challenge.

We as Idaho Democrats pledge to do all we can to live up to the high standards expected of us from those who elected us. We pledge to put families, communities, small businesses, and children first in every decision we make. We look forward to performing our duty and it is our privilege to help shape Idaho's future.

For more information, contact:

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